2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the village, which draws in native sons and daughters from all over the country, and often from as far away as Canada and Australia. This loyalty is also evident at other times. Villagers like to think of themselves as a united body, and they take care to protect the appearance of unity before strangers. This is an attitude of which anyone studying the social history of a village becomes keenly aware. Strangers are thus treated with great reserve. The inhabitants of the smaller villages are well known for their reluctance to give any information about their neighbours to strangers. Inquiring visitors are often referred to the parish priest, who, as village spokesman, screens them and, if possible, deals with their questions. The reserve of a village *vis-à-vis* a stranger is considerably more than just an expression of village loyalty. Present also is the very real fear of vengeance should the answer to a stranger's question lead to some unpleasantness for a neighbour. Social relations in a small village are to a very considerable extent governed by the proverb 'Don't make an enemy of your neighbour' (*Taghmilx ghadu lil ġarek*).

In view of this loyalty, it is not surprising that people express their solidarity with their native village by opposition to other villages. A village's traditional rivals are usually those with which it has the most frequent contact. I was almost invariably warned by villagers that the inhabitants of the neighbouring village were a treacherous and savage lot. There are many tales of hostility between neighbouring villages, especially over the celebration of the annual festa, which I dare say have lost nothing in retelling. I was told a number of stories of how youths stampeded goats through their rivals' festa processions, and of expeditions which stole fireworks, attacked street decorations and performed other daring escapades. Although most of these adventures are said to have taken place many years ago, they are no more unusual than some of the incidents that I witnessed.

If the intense inter-village rivalry of former times has abated somewhat, it is probably because increased education and contact outside the villages have helped to break down ignorance and isolation. But this rivalry still lies dormant, and may flare up at the slightest provocation from a traditional rival; I have seen a number of fights over trivial incidents during festas and football matches. The number of police at village feasts and the quantity and density of the barbed-wire entanglements at the Schreiber

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Stadium, where most village football matches are played, are in themselves evidence that fights during these occasions are the rule rather than the exception.

Although there is little formal contact between villages, there is a considerable amount of informal coming and going between their inhabitants. Most inter-village marriages are between partners from neighbouring villages, and the network of kin ties that these form helps to bind the villages of a district together. Inhabitants of neighbouring villages travel to and from work on the same buses, and see each other often at the annual feasts of the district. These multiple relations contribute to a certain district spirit. The most striking example is the unity of the Gozitans, although people from the south of Malta have something of the same spirit of belonging to a particular district. Nonetheless, the knowledge the inhabitants of the southern Maltese villages have of each other cannot be compared to that of the Gozitans, who, for the most part, not only recognize each other by face, name and nickname, but usually know a surprising (and often uncomfortable) amount of personal details about one another.

IV

A person becomes a member of a village by being born there, or marrying or moving into it. The administrative details connected with these acts are quite simple. Parents must register the birth of a child at the local police station, and the parish priest enters the child's name in his register when the baby is baptized, which usually takes place within a few days of its birth. If a man marries into a village, his name will be entered in the parish register, for under Church law the marriage must be performed by the parish priest of the bride, or his delegate. If the couple settles in the husband's village or in a strange village, their names will be recorded on the annual census there, the *status animarum*, which every parish priest prepares for his bishop. All changes of address are supposed to be given (but often are not) to the Rationing Office and, if the person is over twenty-one, to the Electoral Office. No other civil authorities are interested in a person's whereabouts.

In point of fact, however, most people live in the villages into which they were born. This is another respect in which the towns

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

575 The important officers of a band club are among the most influential people in the community, and are usually chosen from the village's leading citizens. The president is the figurehead of [574] the club. He greets distinguished visitors and handles many of the ceremonial and business relations the club has with other groups within and outside the community. He also presides over committee meetings and over the annual election of new officers. The day-to-day running of the club is in the hands of the secretary, who is registered with the police as the club's official representative. Much of the success of the club depends upon his ability to run its social activities and administrative affairs. Other important committee members are the vice-president, the treasurer and the bandmaster. The latter is very often an outsider who comes to the village only for the weekly rehearsal of the band.

575 554 Though the formal authority of the committee members extends over the members of the association only while they are in the club, their position in the club occasionally gives them a voice in decisions which affect the entire community. This, in turn, gives them a measure of authority over persons who are not members of the club.

575 184 But not all villages have band clubs. The small villages of Gharghur, Dingli and Safi have not been able to afford the luxury of their own bands; though each has a social club that performs much the same function as a social and civic centre. A few villages, such as Kortin, have both social clubs and band clubs. But there are neither band clubs nor social clubs in the Maltese villages of [517] Marsaskala, Marsaxlokk and Mġarr. In Gozo, only Rabat, Xewkija and Xaghra have band clubs. All the villages without clubs are fishing or agricultural communities. This may be because the men of these villages do not dispose of the leisure time in the evening necessary for a club to be a success: the farmers are too tired, and the fishermen are off tending their nets.

575 665 There are also political and football clubs in most Maltese villages. In Gozo there are a few football clubs, but no political clubs. These clubs are organized in much the same way as the [526] band clubs, and corresponding office holders have similar functions and authority over their members. These offices, however, [554] confer much less prestige. The football clubs, in particular, play only a small part in village affairs. The Malta Labour Party, as has already been noted, is the only political party which has clubs

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

527 are seen putting off the shore and
501 steering their course homewards.

527 The custom of making swings on
526 Ascension Day, is very common in Malta, especially among the country people. In almost every village, lots of women and children may be seen swinging together and singing merrily on the day of *Lapsi*.

527 No reason could perhaps be assigned
173 by the Maltese for the practice of celebrating *Lapsi* by parties and picnics on the water, and for making swings, except that they follow the custom of their ancestors.

---

796 ***St. JOHN'S EVE***
372
857 Not unlike other nations, the Maltese are not indifferent in celebrating

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

beautiful display of fireworks, on the eve of the festival, attract thousands of spectators not only from the towns and villages of Malta but also from the sister Island. 527 184

Hundreds of Gozitans flock to Malta in order, as it were, to take part in the general rejoicings held on this special day of the anniversary of the raising of the great siege of Malta, which ended in the total repulse of the Turks, after a most heroic defence by the Knights of St. John, united to the bravery of the Maltese, under the intrepid Grand Master Jean La Valette, in 1565. 527 175 184 648

In the afternoon of the feast (8th Sept.) the grand harbour presents indeed a very lively appearance, there being boat racing and the *giostra* or greasy pole, the prizes for which are given 527 526

?: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

522
526 by Government in commemoration of the defeat of the Turks (*)

The famous annual boat race of the 8th. of September draws as great a concourse of people, comparatively speaking, as the far-famed Oxford and Cambridge contest annually does along the banks of the Thames.

The Valletta harbour quays, from the new extension, right up to the old Barriera, and all the overlooking lines of walls and batteries, on both sides of the harbour, are early taken possession of by thousands of spectators who take great delight in this exciting annual regatta.

The course is from "Ras Hanzir"

796
648 (*) Both the regatta and the *giostra* were formerly held on the 10th of August, St. Lawrence day—The Parochial feast of Vittoriosa, the principal seat during the memorable siege of 1565.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

to the Custom house, the whole length of which is always crowded with thousands of picturesquely painted boats, yachts, and small crafts with living cargo. 529 526

The race course in the centre channel is always well kept clear by a couple of steam launches, and the Port Department gondolas.

The races consist of (1) four-oared fishing boats (2) double pair and single pair passage boats—that is boats employed for the conveyance of passengers —and (3) four-oared *cajjicchi.*

The boats used for racing, on this special day, are always very gaily painted and gilt, being also of a much lighter and sharper build than the others of the same kind, and the best stalwart men are always selected for rowing. [501]

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

E27
526

When the victory prizes are awarded, the beaten racers return crest-fallen in silence to their creeks, whilst the victors, cheered by the immense crowds of spectators, keep ploughing the deep, with the prize flags tied up at the prow end of the boat, waving in the breeze.

The boat race is immediately followed by the *Giostra* or greasy pole, which adds not a little to the amusement of the crowds assembled to witness the sports.

The *Giostra* is a large barge, anchored opposite the Custom House buildings, in the centre of the port, having a long tapering pole, placed almost horizontally from the head, with a small white and red flag fixed on at the end, and made slippery with grease, soap, and other ingredients. At a given signal a number of boys first, then lads and men,

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

in their bathing costume, immediately begin the task of endeavouring to seize the flag, one after another they continue tumbling into the water and raising again to renew the attempt.

Gradually the greasy matter diminishes and the competitors are able to advance further. At last the winner with the prize flag in hand, amidst great shouts of "bravo," loud whistling, and clapping of hands announces the end of the National Feast for that day.

The 7th of September is also commemorated by a melancholy, and at the same time imposing, ceremony at the Co-Cathedral Church of St. John in Valletta.

On the morning of this day the celebrant, preceded by the Chapter and Clergy, descend into the crypt beneath the High Altar, and while chanting

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

ANCIENT AND MODERN SPORTS, USAGES, CEREMONIES &c.

OF THE

MALTESE PEOPLE

THE MAY POLE

This is one of the most amusing out- 527
door diversions which at the time of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem was kept annually on the 1st of May in the square facing the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta.

This popular amusement has been lately revived in Malta and is kept on some particular feast days.

The May Pole consists of a tall mast [526]
erected in some open place or square

527
526 and different kinds of provisions are hung to a hoop fixed on the top of it.

The mast is rubbed with tallow from the bottom to about a third of its height, and on a given signal, from one of the Authorities, some young men, mostly of the lower class, run to the mast, where they form themselves into different parties, the nimblest one amongst them climbing on his comrades' shoulders who defend him from the others, and he who first reaches the flag, which waves on the top of the pinnacle, receives a money prize and carries off the provisions.

The art of mounting to the top consists in twisting successively linen or cotton bands and straw round the slippery part of the mast, so that while the foot rests on the band first knotted, the hands are employed in fixing a second and a third on which, being sus-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

pended by the hands, it is necessary to untie the first knot with the feet, in order to replace it a second time on the fourth step of this kind of ladder. The greasy part of the mast being once surmounted, the remaining part of the ascent is comparatively easy, and the adventurer, who has already overcome the greatest difficulty, is encouraged to proceed by repeated acclamations from the crowd. 527 526

When the pinnacle is reached the brave climber rests on a little seat made of ropes, and untying the provisions throws some of them amongst the people, whose eagerness to seize them always causes some laughable disputes.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

houses. This, he observes, is a relic of an ancient custom among the Heathens, who observed the last 4 days of April, and the 1st day of May in honour of the goddess *Flora* who was imagined to be the deity presiding over the fruits and flowers.

171 529 824

THE CUCCANJA

This is an entertainment which was formerly given by the Grand Master to the Maltese on Shrove Tuesday, the last day of the Carnival.

175 529

Long beams were fixed against the guard house opposite the palace, and between each of the beams, rope-ladders were fastened, the whole being covered over with branches of trees in leaf, to which were tied, from top to bottom, live animals, baskets full of eggs, hams, sausages, and all kinds of provisions.

529 526 175

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

527
526
175

This wooden edifice was crowned by a globe, made up of hoops and covered over with linen cloth, on which stood the figure of *Fame* holding a flag with the Grand Master's arms. Crowds of people assembled on the spacious square, and at a given signal commence to attack the *Cuccanja*, and the provisions became the property of those who, having seized them, were able to carry them off in safety through the crowd.

This lively proceeding was the cause of furious disturbances—the possessors of the various prizes having a rather rough time of it, before being allowed to retire with what they captured.

To the first enterprising individual who reached the figure of *Fame* was allotted some pecuniary remuneration which was well earned, considering the struggle he had gone through to attain

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

his object, and on the standard being taken to be returned to the Grand Master, the cloth covered globe burst open and out came a flight of pigeons. 527 526 175

The Maltese never allowed either foreigners or soldiers to share the profits of the *cuccanja*.

This entertainment which has been suppressed since the reign of the Grand Master De Rohan (1775-1797) was a a source of great delight to the Maltese people. [656]

BOWLS

A game of bowls is a favourite pastime in Malta. 562

The players arrange themselves in sides of three or four each, and each man is usually provided with three bowls, which he marks differently for distinction.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

•526 The bowling ground selected by the players is either some country lane, a smooth flat piece of turf, or a ditch.

The game consists in sending first, by one of the players, a small round wooden ball called *lozzu* or *likk* (the jack) to a distance of some 5 or 6 yards, and the aim of the players is to send their bowls, from the same place, that may lie as near as possible to the jack.

The side whose bowls are nearest the *jack* reckon one point for each bowl so placed. 11, 12, 15 &c. points make game according to mutual arrangement before hand.

In each side there are always a player or two who are reputed the best for either sending or throwing their bowls with accuracy and skill.

When two or more bowls, belonging to the players of the same side, accumu-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

late round the *jack*, one of the adversaries' side, who is left for the purpose, is called by the skip (l'imghallem), whose duty is to direct each of the men of his side, to play straight at the jack with force, and this generally succeeds in hitting and carrying away the jack from the neighbourhood of his opponents' bowls. 526

When the game is finished the losers, as a rule, stand drinks to the winning side.

PLAYING AT *MORRA*

The Maltese of the lower class, especially boatmen and coal-heavers are very fond of playing at *Morra*. 524 [565]

The *Morra* is a game that keeps the two adversaries—between whom it is played—on the alert and which creates great excitement between them.

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

he cares to attend the Cathedral of Mdina, the island's earliest capital, on the 4th November, he will hear a Mass said for the repose of the soul of Roger the Norman, Count of Sicily, who ended the Arab occupation of Malta in 1090 and is there commemorated as "Deliverer of Malta and Founder of the *mensa* [table] of the Cathedral, the Bishop and the Canons." Should he chance to be in Malta before the beginning of Lent he will have the opportunity to witness in the carnival festivities not only the jollifications common to other Mediterranean carnivals but also features of more local interest, such as the Parata dance on the Palace Square, which takes its symbolism from the capture of a Maltese bride by a Moslem corsair.

If he prolongs his stay into the summer he will see on the 29th June, the feast of S. Peter and S. Paul, one of the most characteristic of Maltese popular functions in the densely thronged Mnarja races. These races, for horses and donkeys, are of unknown but undoubtedly great age. The course is a piece of straight, hard road leading uphill towards the big square in front of Mdina, a square known as the Saqqaja. Here, from his great stone box, the Grand Master in former days, in these days the Governor of Malta, hands the banners of victory down to the winning competitors, while interested spectators watch the proceedings from two smaller but similar boxes, flanking the Grand Master's and belonging to some of the leading families of the island.

The name Mnarja is a corruption of the Latin *luminaria* (illumination), for it was the custom on that day to illuminate the churches of Mdina and the adjacent Rabat in honour of the two saints. A more picturesque if unfortunately less trustworthy tradition derives Mnarja from Hymen, the goddess of marriage, it being supposed that the young men of the island were formerly in the habit of choosing their wives from among the maidens crowding to watch the contest. This much, at all events, may be urged in support of the latter theory, that until modern times Maltese brides

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
EZ6 Malta EZ6

527 would insist on the stipulation being inserted in their
173 marriage settlement, their *kitba taz-zwieġ*, that their husbands
584 should take them to the Mnarja every year.

The banners given in prizes to the present day are long
•526 and narrow pieces of brocade of different colours called
361 *paliu*, which it is the custom of the fortunate winners to take back to their casals to be used as the altar-cloth of the parish church for the ensuing year. The casals, it should be explained, are the 'villages' of Malta, if 'village' is the appropriate term, for they are stone-built compact townships with populations often running into five figures. The Maltese word for them is *hal*.

291 Again, our visitor will learn that the *faldetta* or *ghonnella*—the true Maltese term is *stamina*—of the Maltese women does not owe its existence, as some people allege, to the need for defence against the excessive gallantry of Bonaparte's troops, but is of much more ancient origin. If proof were needed, there is in the Royal Malta Library a print of the year 1576 showing a Maltese lady wearing the national head-dress. The *ghonnella* is a voluminous hood of rich silk—black everywhere save in the villages of Zabbar and Zejtun, where it is blue and is called *xurqana*—stiffened inside the top edge by a piece of cardboard about a yard long, one end of which rests on the head, while the other end has to be held. Originally, it was really, like the Turkish *charshaf*, a skirt or petticoat (which is what the word *ghonnella* means) thrown up over the head. Later it was curtailed, for which reason it is sometimes called *nofs ghonnella*, a half skirt; but it is still cut to show the placket-hole—in point of fact, half the placket-hole—of the garment from which it has sprung.

[191] This striking and picturesque mode of female adornment or, rather, concealment constitutes Malta's one characteristic article of dress and is the local method of shrouding a woman's face and form, a custom common to southern latitudes from as far east as India to as far west as the Azores,